

THE ROLE OF THE FRENCH POET AS CONCEIVED BY  
MAROT, RONSARD, MALHERBE AND RÉGNIER

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## INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial there have been poets and poetry. It is a fundamental assumption that poets are our most beloved and persuasive teachers of what makes life significant. The truly great poets are those who have presented the largest area of human experience most justly and powerfully. Among the many who assert their claims to lead humanity to safety and fullness of joy--scientists, sages, economists, theologians, philosophers--poets differ from them all in very decided ways. Scientists are expert teachers in physical things, but they deal with facts and forces, not with spiritual values. Sages are wise men whose feet are guided by the lamp of experience; therefore they look toward the past and condense the wisdom of many into an arresting sentence. The economists help us in our fortunes, but not in our prayers. And theologians rear monumental systems confidently and with infinite care, yet these highly articulated structures we use, not as pillars of fire and cloud, but as milestones, marking humanity's progress. Philosophers make the strongest claim to fullness of wisdom. Plato is the sovereign of them all because of the range and profundity of his poetic imagination. Science, proverbial wisdom, and systems of thought belong to the realm of knowledge, and knowledge passes

away; poetry belongs to the realm of values and is less affected by the flight of time.<sup>1</sup> Percey B. Shelly proposes that:

Poets are keenly sensitive men, reacting powerfully to influences which would be unnoticed by coarser natures. They reveal to us something we should otherwise miss; they uncover a real world of beauty and significance; they apprehend qualities in objects and situations which are veiled to ordinary man; they lift the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and make familiar objects be as if they were not familiar. This delicate sensitivity causes them to feel keenly, to react powerfully, and the strength of their emotions quickens all their intellectual processes. They seem to be lifted above themselves, and thought and emotion become inspiration, art, poetry.<sup>2</sup>

Poets are the mighty revelators of life and the poetry they create is a revelation or an interpretation of life in some of its aspects. Great poetry interprets life greatly; it reveals experience in amplest range, comprehensively and profoundly. Philosophers talk about life, poets represent it; they reveal it in its extreme moments, its raptures, its tragedies, its victories. It is because the poet feels more intensely than other men that he is capable of great and authoritative expression.

Poets have always believed that their office was to make men better. The highest human interests are virtue and truth, and it is the poet who teaches truth and virtue better than any other. The Greek poets felt the presence of Apollo.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles A. Dinsmore, The Great Poets and the Meaning of Life (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

They were mastered men, and their enthusiasm was the energizing of the god within them. Therefore poets and prophets speak as oracles, with authority and not as reasoners. The authority of great poetry is that it is the utterance of primal instincts and the treasured experience of the race. They have been the chief inspirers of the generations calling them to virtue, heroism, and love. They interpret the innermost spirit of their country and civilization to the world.<sup>1</sup>

The great Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, directed their storehouses of wisdom and knowledge to the treatment of the poet, the poet's mission, poetic inspiration and poetic theory. In Plato's "Ion," from the Dialogues of Plato, he treats, through his character, Socrates, the conception of the poet and his mission as well as poetic inspiration. Socrates speaks to the rhapsodist Ion:

The Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. For all good poets...compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed....For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles....God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know them to be speaking not of themselves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God himself is the speaker, and that through them he is conversing with us.... For in this way the God would seem to indicate to us and not allow us to doubt that these beautiful

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

poems are not human, or the work of man, but divine and the work of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the Gods by whom they are severely possessed.<sup>1</sup>

In Aristotle's Poetics, we find that "poetry has its origin in the instinct for imitation." For Aristotle, as for Plato, "the artist is an imitator and art is mimetic; and, poetry springs naturally from the instinct for imitation."<sup>2</sup>

It is with the ideas expressed by these two timeless philosophers that rests the lofty conception of the poet, poetry, and the poet's mission. It is to them that many poets refer when defending their positions of nobility and the noble station of poetry.

At all times, poets have been concerned to offer a serious, worthwhile justification of their practice. This was too, a primary concern of the French Renaissance poets. In French literary history, it was during the Renaissance period that the conception of the poet and his role received much attention. Throughout the sixteenth century is found the theme of the vates, the inspired seer whose main function was to communicate that which he saw. This conception was associated in particular with the Pléiade, but there existed traces of it in the rhétoriciens and a few of the earlier poets.

The spirit of the Renaissance was one of transition

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<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Jowett, The Dialogues of Plato (New York: Liveright Publication Corp., 1927), pp. 127-128.

<sup>2</sup>Milton C. Nahm, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), pp. xii-xiii.

and revitalization which not only affected studies and philosophy, but also effected a change in the situation of the writer. The close of the Middle Ages brought an end to the rhétoriqueur poets. The rhétoriciens, (shunned by the Pléiade), were propagandists of the Court, dependant upon royal personages for their subsistence. Under the influence of Francis I and his sister, Marguerite of Angoulême, the royal court became the center not only of worldly elegance and luxury but also of the highest intellectual and artistic culture which enables poets to realize more fully than before their own dignity. Because the rhétoriciens had had to exist on meagre and always extremely variable pensions, a large portion of their poetic effort had to be spent on the flattery of the nobility. As court poets they were entertainers and chroniclers whose services were readily expendable. But with the birth of the Renaissance period, initiated by the Italianizing of the French royal court, the poets became more valuable both for their prestige-value as living embodiments of learning and culture and also in their role as propagandists for the sovereign. Thence, poets no longer felt themselves automatically inferior to the kings and nobles to whom they addressed their poems.

The transition from Medievalism to the Renaissance period is represented by Clément Marot, last of the rhétoriciens, first of the modern poets. Marot saw his role not only as an immortalizer of men, but also as the guardian of traditional values and regarded himself as being obligated

to the public for which he wrote. He accepted his vocation of court poet as magnifier of the king and his court.

Believing in a more dignified conception of the poet and his mission, Pierre de Ronsard and the Pléiade dismissed Marot as a servile court puppet. The great wealth of literary material introduced to the French by the Italians was felt to be one of mankind's most precious possessions. To enter into this rich heritage, to add to it, and to enlarge it was held to be a great honour and a great responsibility. It was a vocation in the most solemn sense of the word, and to fit oneself for the vocation of poet demanded the most strenuous pursuit of moral virtue. Ronsard believed this virtue, the virtue that is in the poet himself and in his poetry, to be that which constituted the only true nobility. He viewed poetry as virtue, an excellence of the individual human soul, which is its own reward and its own justification. Ronsard emphasized the idea of divine inspiration which aided in the defense of the necessary liberty of the poet against the "slavery" of court life and official poetry to which the poet found himself constrained by the demands of his material situation. The poet had not merely to defend himself against the pressures imposed by his own financial and social situation; he had above all to defend, or rather to convince people of the status of poetry as something special and supremely valuable in its own right.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Grahame Castor, Pléiade Poetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 3.



The resurgence of the god-inspired poet who had a noble and somewhat sacred mission encountered total opposition from seventeenth-century reason and discipline in general and François de Malherbe in particular. Malherbe projected the idea of the poet as a mere arranger of verse and nothing more, substituting inspiration for hard work and technique. In direct opposition to Malherbe and in defense of poetic inspiration, we find Mathurin Régnier. Though Régnier was a contemporary of Malherbe, he belonged to the school of the Renaissance poets by virtue of his conception of the poet and the poet's role.

The conception of the role of the poet has extreme variations from period to period and oftentimes from individual to individual within a period as was the case of Malherbe and Régnier. Though the poet at times exerts a great influence upon his environment, his environment often directs and dictates to him his role and his concept of the poet's role. These concepts are set forth in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER I

### CLÉMENT MAROT

The Renaissance period had varied and sundry causes. One of the principal causes was the Italian wars. These wars--begun by Charles VIII, continued by Louis XII and Francis I, and ended by Henry II--put France in contact with the civilization of the Italian Renaissance. The French were overwhelmed by the luxury and refinement they encountered in Italy, especially at the Italian court. The expeditions into Italy had a profound influence on the French and their culture. This influence was most greatly evidenced during the reign of Francis I. Mesmerized by the cultivation of the Italian court, Francis I became aware of the influence that could be exerted by a prestigious court. In imitation of the Italians, the French court soon became a means of display characterized by pomp and ceremony. Francis I further advanced the development of the French Renaissance by bringing to France many of the Italian artists, craftsmen, and men of letters such as Leonardo de Vinci and Baldassare Castiglione.

Much was done to encourage, not only architecture and the visual arts, but also letters, and at that time, there

was an upsurge in the patronage offered to writers and scholars. The role of the Court as part of the state apparatus assumed growing proportions and literature like the other arts played its role. Poetry in particular contributed to the propaganda system of the monarchy, celebrating the prowesses of French king and military leaders and the events of the Court such as births, marriages, and deaths. Along with the growth and development of the Court, the needs of entertainment were also augmented, and the Court had its accredited poets.

The poet, during this period is described in the following passage by I. D. McFarlane:

the poet is not merely a versifier, he may be a chronicler and enjoy some position at Court; he will participate in court ceremonial; he may act as a mouthpiece for political attitudes and actions; he may well be involved in the religious debates of the civil wars; he is, broadly speaking, an articulate patriot. All these commitments will condition in high degree the genres in which he works; many will be of a serious purpose, but others will have entertainment as their end, and in some cases the poet will compose verse for the benefit of some royal personage.<sup>1</sup>

The poet at court thus became a part of the embellishments that contributed to the grandeur of the Court.

It was in this milieu that Clément Marot was to develop as a poet. Clément Marot, son of the rhétoricien Jean Marot, was born at Cahors, capital of the province of Quercy in or about 1496. He spent the first ten years of his life there, and in 1506 he went to Paris with his father who had secured

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<sup>1</sup>I. D. McFarlane, A Literary History of France (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1974), p. 11.

a position as valet and poet of Anne of Brittany. There, he was exposed to the atmosphere of court life. Marot matriculated at the University of Paris where he completed courses in art. Afterwards, he became a law student, but occupied himself more with the activities of the "Enfants-sans-souci." In 1514, with some persuasion from his father, Clément Marot became page to Nicolas of Neufville, Lord of Villeroy. While under the patronage of Nicolas of Neufville, he wrote "Le Temple de Cupidon" which he dedicated to Francis I in 1515.

In 1519, with recommendation from the king, he became valet to Marguerite of Angoulême, sister of the king who became his protector as well as his friend. It was under the patronage of Princess Marguerite that Marot took conscience of his talent. Though initially a poet after the manner of the rhétoriciens, he began to develop as a modern poet. In the entourage of the princess he learned:

que l'heure de la Rhétorique était passée, que la véritable poésie exigeait autre chose que de pédantes allégoriques et des rimes compliquées; et pour être poète, il faut d'abord traduire avec naturel des sentiments sincères.<sup>1</sup>

At the court of the princess, Marot also involved himself in the Reformation movement. This involvement would soon prove unfavorable to him.

In 1525, stringent measures had been taken in an attempt to suppress heretic activity. Consequently the observance of

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<sup>1</sup>Pierre Jourda, Marot: l'homme et l'oeuvre (Paris: Boivin & Cie, 1950), p. 11.

Church ordinances was enforced with rigor. Accused of eating bacon during Lent, Marot was arrested and imprisoned. His protectors away, he appealed to Doctor Bouchar. In an epistle to him, Marot proclaimed himself innocent and as well, an orthodox Christian:

Point ne suis "lutheriste,"  
Ne Zwinglien, et moin anabaptiste,  
Je suis de Dieu par son fils Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

His appeal received no positive response. He then turned to his friend Lyon Jamet to whom he dedicated the fable of the "Lion and the Rat." Through Jamet's efforts, Marot was transferred to a nominal prison at Chartres where he finished the writing of one of his most celebrated works, "l'Enfer." He was released shortly afterwards on the king's return.

Jean Marot died in September of 1526 and Clément Marot succeeded him as valet to the king in 1527. Marot and some others aided a prisoner in an escape and again Marot was arrested and imprisoned that same year. In an epistle "Au roi pour le délivrer de prison," he appealed to the king for his liberty:

Roy des Francoys, plein de toutes bontez,  
Quinze jours a (je les ay bien contez)  
Et dès demain seront justement seize,  
Que je fuz faict confrere au diocese  
De Saint Marry, en l'eglise Saint Pris:  
Si vous diray comment je fuz surpris,  
Et me desplaist qu'il fault que je le die;  
.....  
Très humblement requerrant vostre grace  
De pardonner à ma trop gran' audace  
D'avoir emprins ce sot escript vous faire,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

Et m'excusez si pour le mien affaire  
 Je ne suis point vers vous allé parler:  
 Je n'ay pas eu le loysir d'y aller.<sup>1</sup>

The king granted him liberty.

Marot enjoyed favorable conditions at court. As official court poet, he accompanied the Court throughout France chronicling its events. In 1532, he published his first collection of poems, "Clementine Adolescence." Though Marot enjoyed favorable conditions at court, he was continually condemned and accused as a heretic because of his Protestant tendencies. Signaled out as being among the conspirators in the "Affair of the Placards"\* in 1534, he was forced to leave France. Marot fled to Ferrare in Italy where he learned to write in the style of the Italians, incorporating into his repertoire of poetic forms the strambotti and the Italian sonnets. He also created the French Blason. In 1536, he went to Venice and after a short period of time, he wrote to the king asking for permission to return to France. In his "Epitre au Roy" he wrote:

De Lutheriste ilz m'ont donné le nom  
 Qu'à droict ce soit, je leur responds que non.  
 Luther pour moy des cieulx n'est descendu,  
 Luther en croix n'a point esté pendu,  
 Pour mes pechez; et tout bien advisé,  
 Au nom de luy ne suis point baptizé.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Tilley, The Literature of the French Renaissance, Tome I (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1959), p. 75.

\*The "Affair of the Placards" has reference to the event in which members and sympathizers of the Reformation mutilated statues of the Virgin Mary and posted placards against the Eucharist upon buildings throughout the city as well as on the doors of the King's palace.

<sup>2</sup>Raoul Morçay and Armand Müller, La Renaissance (Paris: Editions Mondiales, 1960), p. 83.

He was allowed to return to France being compelled to make a public recantation of heresy.

Upon his return, Marot resumed his role as official court poet. He translated and circulated thirty Psalms in 1539, later published in 1541-42. The Sorbonne held that translations of the Scriptures were heretical and once again he was under attack. With the publication of "l'Enfer," viewed also as a heretical work, Marot was again forced to flee France, installing himself at Geneva where he continued his translations of the Psalms. A game of backgammon he played for five sous caused a scandal. Marot then retreated to Savoy. He died shortly thereafter in Turin in 1544.

Marot's conception of his role as poet was based on the two schools of which he was a part, that of the rhétoriciens of the Middle Ages and that of the Renaissance. As a rhétoricien he believed his role to be that of the guardian of traditional values. Like his rhétoricien predecessors, he believed that it was his duty to please as well as instruct the public for which he wrote. And like them, he wrote in the popular genres of their time--the virelai, rondeau, balade, chant royal. As a modern poet, Marot saw his role basically as one of moralizer as well as immortalizer.

As a court poet Marot was undoubtedly influenced by his environment, conceiving it his duty to laud the king and his court. A propagandist for the Court, Marot was himself influenced by court propaganda. He was in many respects a

copy of the Renaissance man found in Castiglione's The Courtisan (1528). In his work, Castiglione asserts that the courtisan should be one who is accomplished and cultivated:

Il est familier de tous les jeux et exercices corporels, il est aussi cultivé et agréable causeur. Il aime les arts et la danse et platonise en amour. Sa fonction est aussi politique: serviteur de son prince, il doit user d'adresse et de courage pour le guider vers la vertu.<sup>1</sup>

Because of his rhétoriqueur inheritance and his submission to his role as court poet, Marot was severely criticized. Often times he was considered not as a poet but simply as a writer, a mere court jester, a buffoon even.

François Sagon, a Norman priest, was one of Marot's contemporaries and one of his most severe critics. He denounced Marot as being, not a poet, but an "obscure rhymers." The Pléiade acridly criticized Marot in the same fashion:

Il avait cru que l'esprit et la grâce suffisaient à faire un poète, il n'avait pas eu les dons précieux qui marquent vraiment un élu des Muses. Échappé de la rhétorique, qui avait gâté ses débuts, il n'avait abouti qu'au simple badinage: ce n'était pas assez. Sans doute, il avait subi l'influence de la Cour, d'une cour des plus brillantes, très éprise de politesse et de grâce mondaine: et là son talent s'était assoupli....Car, enfin, de quelle imagination Marot avait-il fait preuve? De quelle science dans les conceptions? De quelle supériorité dans la faculté de sentir et d'exprimer les sentiments? Tous ces dons lui manquaient. L'insuffisance de sa culture, incapable de compenser les manques de sa nature, l'avait condamné à n'être toute sa vie que le premier des rimeurs de cour.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Ménager, Introduction à la vie littéraire du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris: Bordas, 1968), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Henri Chamard, Histoire de la Pléiade, Tome I (Paris: Henri Dedier, Libraire-Editeur, 1939), pp. 138-140.



Some of Marot's critics, like Henry Cary, believed that Marot had the potential to become a poet. The historian Morçay declared Marot to have been "un homme du moyen âge par sa façon de concevoir le rôle et l'oeuvre du poète." Like Cary, he suggests:

Assurément, Clément Marot a apporté en ce monde, au jour de sa naissance, le don mystérieux qui fait les poètes; mais son talent naturel s'est développé et modifié en suivant une évolution qu'expliquent en partie les milieux qu'il a traversés. Au fur et à mesure qu'il avance dans la vie, il se laisse impressionner et former par la Cour, par l'Italie, par l'humanisme, par la Réforme.<sup>1</sup>

Emile Faguet, however, concluded that Marot was indeed a poet:

Il est poète de naissance, de complexion, de caractère, d'instruction, de pratique et de commerce.<sup>2</sup>

Like Faguet, P. M. Smith believed Marot to be a true poet and one who had a dignified conception of his role as poet. While conscious of the demands of his task, Marot was not inhibited by them. His conception of the poet capable of conferring immortality gave him princely standing:

Et mon renom en aultant de provinces  
Est despendu comme celluy des princes.  
S'ilz vainquent gens en faict d'armes divers,  
Je les surmonte en beaulx escriptz et vers;  
S'ilz ont tresor, j'ay en tresor des choses  
Qui ne sont point en leurs coffres encloses;  
S'ilz sont puyssantz, j'ay la puyssance telle  
Que fere puyz ma maistresse immortelle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morçay, La Renaissance, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Emile Faguet, Seizième siècle (Paris: Boivin & Cie, Editeurs, s.d.), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>P. M. Smith, Clément Marot (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1970), p. 55.

Marot fought for values and freedoms which were constantly assailed and undermined. Both his circumstances and his nature enjoined him to satire. "Frère Lubin" and "Coq à l'âne" are among his more famous satires. He spoke from close experiences of the abuses he condemned. Marot was well aware of his mission as a satirical poet. Though he was aware of his role as a satirical poet, he was equally aware of the consequences attendant in a society overruled by repressive forces. In "Excuses aux dames de Paris" (1529), he wrote:

Brief, pour escrire y a bien d'autres choses  
 Dedans Paris trop longuement encloses.  
 Tant de Broillis qu'en Justice on tolere,  
 Je l'escriroys, mais je crains la colere;  
 L'Oysiveté des Prebstres et Cagotz,  
 Je la diroys, mais garde les Fagotz:  
 Et des abus dont l'Eglise est fourrée,  
 J'en parleroyz, mais garde la Bourrée:<sup>1</sup>

Marot's conception of his role as court poet and his acceptance of his role was justifiable. Robert Griffin explains:

The attitude of the Renaissance poet toward his work had to reflect a so-to-speak triangular relationship between poet, work, and audience in which the relationship between any two of the terms affects, and is affected by the third. Thus the poet, as he surveys his projected work, must take into account the audience that will receive and judge it, such that the taste of his intended audience conditions the character of the work as executed.<sup>2</sup>

Many of Clément Marot's critics asserted that he lacked a dignified conception of the poet and of his mission. But,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Griffin, Clément Marot and the Inflections of Poetic Voice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 245.

Marot was confident of the poet's power to bestow immortality. He claimed for poetry consolatory and therapeutic powers. Towards the end of his career, influenced by Neoplatonism, he subscribed to the theory of the poet divinely inspired. He felt and expressed a legitimate pride in his work. He is a striking example of a writer whose sensibility and whose gifts were completely in accord with his circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, Clément Marot, p. 56.

## CHAPTER II

### PIERRE DE RONSARD

In 1547 Henry II succeeded his father Francis I to the throne. Unlike his father, Henry II was a man of limited intellectual ability, interesting himself more in sports, particularly the tournaments in which he was accidentally killed in 1559. Even though Henry II was not a patron of the arts, the court and the arts did flourish, in large part because of his sister, Maria of France and his wife Catherine of Medici, patrons and protectors of men and arts and letters.

During this period, Protestantism and humanism were widespread, though Protestantism was severely checked by Henry II, who continued in the persecution of Protestant dissent that was initiated by his father. Humanism--the name given to the rediscovery, translation, and interpretation of ancient texts (mainly Greek, Roman, and Alexandrian)--produced many scholars of antiquity, with Erasmus, Henri Estienne, Guillaume Budé, and Jean Dorat among its chief exponents. This revitalization of antiquity gave rise to a literary revolution directed by the Pléiade which was spearheaded by Pierre de Ronsard.

Considered by his contemporaries as the Homer or Virgil of his time as well as the "Prince of Poets," Pierre de Ronsard,

descendant of a noble family through his mother, Jeanne Chaudrier, was born September 11, 1524, at his father's manor house of La Possonnière near the village of Couture in the Vendômois. His father, Loys Roussart, was a chevalier of the order of St. Michael. Through his father's successes at Court--he was charged with the household of Francis I's sons who were sent to Spain as hostages for their father--and his alliance with the noble Chaudrier family, Ronsard had an established place in the ranks of the provincial gentry and a future position at Court. At the age of nine, he was sent to the College of Navarre. He remained there only one term (1533-34), after which he renounced formal study. In 1536, nearly twelve years of age, he went to Avignon to join the French court and royal army, and to begin his life as an apprentice courtier. He was appointed page to Francis, eldest son of Francis I. After the dauphin's sudden death, he served his younger brother Charles, Duke of Orleans. In 1537 he sailed for Scotland with James V and his bride Madeleine of France. His stay was brief, for the new queen died soon after her arrival. In the same year Ronsard was attached to a special diplomatic mission and again set out for Scotland where he may have met Claudio Duci, "le seigneur Paul," who initiated him to the Latin poets Virgil and Horace. He remained at the Scottish court for two years, and after spending six months in England returned to France in 1539. Ronsard then entered the Écurie Royale, the Royal Riding School, an

academy which trained young noblemen in knightly accomplishments and in the knowledge they would need at court or in royal service. In 1540 he was attached to the mission of Lazare de Baïf, the French representative at the meeting of the German Protestant Princes at Hagenau. On his return to France, he frequented the Court where he was remarked for his fine physique and his skill in athletic exercises. Shortly thereafter, Ronsard was felled by a severe malarial fever which left him half-deaf. He withdrew from the Court and from the Écurie Royal to his father's estate where he began slow convalescence and study of poetry.

In 1543 Ronsard received the tonsure of a cleric at Le Mans from René du Bellay, bishop of the Ronsard family. Jacques Peletier du Mans, secretary of the bishop, read some of Ronsard's early poetry and encouraged his efforts. He also advised him to become thoroughly familiar with ancient poetry while continuing to write his verse in French. At that time, Ronsard had determined to devote himself to literature.

Upon the death of his father in 1544, Ronsard, at the age of twenty, went to Paris to undertake the study of Greek and Latin letters that he felt essential to prepare himself for the vocation of poet. Established in the townhouse of Lazare de Baïf, he shared the private lessons of Jean-Antoine de Baïf, son of Lazare de Baïf. Their tutor was Jean Dorat, scholar and interpreter of Greek texts, pupil of Guillaume

Budé. Soon after, Dorat was appointed principal of the College of Coqueret where Ronsard and Baïf joined him. It was there that Ronsard formed his great project for the reform of French poetry that was envisioned by Peletier. In 1547 he convinced Du Bellay, whom he met accidentally in an inn between Poitiers and Paris, to join him in his undertaking. Inspired by the teachings of Dorat and the writings of the humanists, Ronsard and Du Bellay along with Jean-Antoine de Baïf, Étienne Jodelle, Pontus de Tyard, Rémy Belleau, Jacques Peletier, and Dorat himself (the members of the Pléiade), set out to enrich the French language, rehabilitate French poetry in particular, and put French on an equal footing with other great languages. In 1549, encouraged by Ronsard, Du Bellay wrote the manifesto of the Pléiade, "The Defense and Illustration of the French Language." The twofold title of Du Bellay's treatise corresponds to the two books into which it is divided, the first defending the French language and the second showing how it could be enriched. In the treatise, Du Bellay holds that only by imitating the Greeks and Romans could the French language acquire excellence. Ronsard and Du Bellay suggest the creation of new words, either by adopting terms used in the technical language of trades or professions, or by borrowing words from old provincial dialects or ancient languages, or by utilizing already existing words from which new derivatives could be formed. Du Bellay dismisses the whole of French poetry--save the "Roman de la

Rose"--as unworthy of being read, disdaining the medieval poets. The Pléiade believed in and insisted on the poet's high mission. They also held the conviction that the poet must be a seer and sage, no mere amuser of the court; that the poet is god-possessed, the vehicle of an inspiration greater than himself, conferring fame and immortality on the earth's monarchs.<sup>1</sup>

Two of the literary forces in particular that influenced the ideas of the Pléiade were Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism. Neoplatonism offered a dignified conception and justification of poetry. It espoused the theory of the four "fureurs" relevant to man's spiritual ascent. Pontus de Tyard wrote of them in his "Solitaire I":

Or, pource que l'ame en descendant, et s'abisemant dans le corps, passe par quatre degrez, il est pareillement necessaire, que par quatre degrez son elevation de ca bas en haut, soit faite....La premiere est par la fureur Poëtique procedant du don des Muses. La seconde est par l'intelligence des mysteres, et secrets des religions souz Bacchus. La troisième par ravissement de prophetie, vaticination, ou divination souz Apollon; et la quatriesme par la violence de l'amoureuse affection souz Amour et Venus.<sup>2</sup>

Louis Le Caron, in "Dialogue III," expresses the idea that the poet has an essential role to play in man's redemption, because he makes him aware of his origins:

leurs chants estoient une vraie doctrine de bien-vivre, ou plustost une sainte fureur qui inspiroit

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Chamard, *Histoire de la Pléiade*, vol. IV (Paris: Henri Dedier, Libraire-Éditeur, 1939), pp. 155-156.

<sup>2</sup>I. D. McFarlane, *A Literary History of France* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1974), p. 203.



les hommes à congnoistre le lieu de leur celeste  
origine.<sup>1</sup>

He holds too that the poet also has the duty of ensuring the fame of those he sings, and that the poet is more gifted than common man, and that the degree of inspiration distinguishes the good poet from the bad.<sup>2</sup> Guillaume Téliin's "Bref sommaire" (1531), stresses the idea of divine inspiration and the vatic quality of the poet. Thomas Sebillet treats similar matters in his "Art poétique francoys" (1548). There were several translations of Aristotle's "Poetics" which espoused the idea of the poet being the imitator of nature.

In 1550, Ronsard published his first volume of poetry, Les Quatre premiers livres des odes de Pierre de Ronsard, Vendômois. In this work, he set forth the new conception of the ancient conception of the poet's dignity:

The poet's duty is enjoined upon him. He is more than man; he is bound to the gods by the links of a mysterious chain. Godhead inhabits him; he is warmed by the divine unease....The man who honors not the poets as the prophets of the gods condemns the gods in odious pride....The poet is chosen and foretold from long aforetime. The favor of the Muses is bestowed as inscrutably as the grace of Jehovah upon his saints.<sup>3</sup>

For Ronsard, poetry was a divine gift which Muses, the agents of divinity, bestowed mysteriously upon those whom they had chosen to be the recipients of the sacred trust. Without

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Morris Bishop, Ronsard: Prince of Poets (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 77.

this gift, no amount of study or art could make of an ordinary mortal a true poet. Inspired by the divine fury, the poet might become a prophet, a seer, an interpreter of the mysteries of the gods and of the universe. Though the poet received this gift through no merit of his own, just as Christians receive grace, he should endeavor to be worthy of the gift and to make use of it in a proper way.<sup>1</sup>

Ronsard, like his mentor, Pindar, believed that the poet alone among men had the power to bestow immortality. Many of Ronsard's ideas concerning poetry, the poet, and the poet's mission are found scattered throughout his poetry. "Ode à Michel de L'Hospital" (1550), houses many of his conceptions. In the poem, the Muses, daughters of Jupiter, ask their father to allow them to reign over nature and man, to give inspiration to the poets, the divine and the prophets, and to be honored by kings and princes:

Donne nous, mon Pere, dit-elle,  
 Qui le Ciel regis de tes loix,  
 Que nostre chanson immortelle  
 Puisse les Dieux de nostre voix:  
 Fay nous princesses des montaignes,  
 Des antres, des eaux et des bois,  
 Et que les prez et les campagnes  
 S'animent dessoubz nostre voix:  
 Donne nous encor davantage,  
 La tourbe des chantres divins,  
 Les poëtes et les devins  
 Et les prophetes en partage.  
 .....  
 Donne nous que les seigneurs,  
 Les empereurs et les princes  
 Soyent veuz Dieux en leurs provinces,  
 S'ilz reverent noz honneurs.

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<sup>1</sup>K. R. W. Jones, Pierre de Ronsard (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 19.

Fay que les roys decorez  
 De noz presentz honorez  
 Soyent aux hommes admirables,  
 Lors qu'ilz vont par leur cité,  
 Ou lors que, plains d'equité,  
 Donnent les lois venerables.<sup>1</sup>

Jupiter grants their request. He decides that thenceforth the first honors on earth would belong to poetry; but that the gift of poetry, superior to human art, would be essentially a divine inspiration which would only occupy a pure heart. The inspired poets alone would be the interpreters of God; and because they are not understood by common man, they would be protected by the Holy Spirit.

Seeing the poet as a moralist, Ronsard insists on the necessary morality of the poet. In the poem, Jupiter recommends to his daughters:

Mais par sus tout, prenez bien garde,  
 Gardez vous bien de n'employer  
 Mes presents dans un cuoeur qui garde  
 Son peché sans le nettoyer:  
 Ains devant que de luy repandre,  
 Purgez-le de vostre doulce eau,  
 Affin que net il puisse prendre  
 Un beau don dans un beau vaisseau.<sup>2</sup>

In his *Abrégé de l'art poétique* (1565), he warns the aspiring poet of his moral responsibilities:

Above all things you will hold the Muses in reverence, indeed in special veneration, and will never cause them to serve low and ridiculous causes, nor insulting libels, but you will always cherish them as sacred, as the daughters of Jupiter, that is of God, who through his holy grace, first revealed

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<sup>1</sup>Chamard, The Pléiade, vol. I, pp. 365-366.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

through them, the excellence of his favor....And so, since the Muses are unwilling to dwell in a soul, unless it be good, holy, and virtuous, you will be of a kindly nature, not wicked, churlish, or ill-tempered; but, moved by a noble spirit, you will allow nothing to enter your mind that is not above the basely human....<sup>1</sup>

In addition to being an immortalizer and a moralizer, Ronsard sees the poet as the portrayer and imitator of nature. Following the Aristotelian concept, he declares in "Abrégé de l'invention" that the task of the poet is to imitate nature in all its diversity. This literary creation is not to be a mere reproduction of objects, but a rendering of what seems true of them and the relating of it to universal truth. In order to achieve his goal, Ronsard accords that the poet's inspiration, his study, his cultivation of ethical and moral values will prepare him for his task, but that the poet must still render his vision in an acceptable and artistic manner.<sup>2</sup>

Ronsard feels that the best guides for the representation of nature are the ancient Greek and Roman poets and their Italian imitators. He takes Pindar as his master and imitates him boldly. According to his doctrine, to recast in French the thought of the godlike Greeks is the poet's noblest task.<sup>3</sup> Like his ancient idols, Homer and Virgil, Ronsard had determined to write an epic (La Franciade), that would be to France what the Iliad was to Greece and the Aeneid

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<sup>1</sup>Jones, Ronsard, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Bishop, Ronsard, p. 80.

to Rome. Having written but four books of his epic, Ronsard left it incomplete.

Ronsard sees himself as under obligation to praise famous men and to "confer glory upon the great." As a court poet, he is accomplished in his mission, lauding the French court and serving four kings: Henry II, Francis II, Charles IX, and Henry III. The "Prince of Poets" is to a great extent the "Poet of Princes."

Ronsard's financial position fluctuated greatly as a result of his serving several kings. Under Henry II, his financial position is a precarious one that colors his views when he discusses the relations between king and poet. It also evokes a satirical element in his writings:

Prince, je t'envoie cette ode,  
Trafiquant mes vers à la mode  
Que le marchand baille son bien,  
Troque pour troq': toi qui es riche,  
Toi, roi de biens, ne soi point chiche  
De changer ton present au mien.  
Ne te lasse point de donner,  
Et tu verras comme j'accorde  
L'honneur que je promai sonner,<sup>1</sup>  
Quant un present dore ma corde.

From the outset of Henry II's reign, Ronsard seeks favor and patronage, dedicating much of his poetry to great personages. His most prolific period of court poetry is under Charles IX. The boy king and Ronsard each finds favor in the other. With the outbreak of the civil and religious wars, Ronsard becomes advisor and counsellor to the crown; the voice of royal policy and spokesman for a number of his fellow citizens. For Ronsard

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<sup>1</sup>Chamard, The Pléiade, vol. I, p. 358.

sees the poet, the seeker of truth, as one concerned with proper government, and he understands himself as forming part of the court machinery which helps the king and his entourage "cut a figure before the public."

Catherine of Medici, the regent mother, believed that certain activities might help reduce political tension during the turmoil. Thus, Ronsard produces much commissioned verse, masquerades, and cartels as a means of diversion and an effort to conciliate hostile sentiments.

Early in 1574, he retires from Court. During the remainder of his life he lives chiefly in the country, writing poetry up until the moment of his death in 1585.

Despite Ronsard's lofty conception of the poet as a man of truth and virtue, he descends to the ribaldry and pedantry that characterizes his predecessors. Because he submits to panegyric, he is reproached by his friends who accuse him of "selling his muse." In times of depression or modesty, Ronsard says himself to be half-poet, and admits that he has conformed to standards other than his own.<sup>1</sup> But throughout his life, Pierre de Ronsard is buoyed up by the belief that it is his mission to make of French a great language and to a large extent he does. Through Ronsard, the French language (and French poetry) attains its majority. In his hands, the language reaches heights unknown to it before.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bishop, Ronsard, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>MacFarlane, History of France, p. 297.

As he elevates French poetry and language, he simultaneously elevates the role of the poet and the poet's mission to a level of sanctity.

Le poète en des jours inipies  
 Vient preparer des jours meilleurs.  
 Il est l'homme des utopies;  
 Les pieds ici, les yeux ailleurs.  
 C'est lui qui sur toutes les têtes,  
 En tout temps, pareil aux prophetes,  
 Dans sa main, ou tout peut tenir,  
 Doit, qu'on l'insulte ou qu'on le loue,  
 Comme une torche qu'il secoue,  
 Faire flamboyer l'avenir.<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of Ronsard, the poet becomes a kind of deity and poetry is no longer regarded merely as an elegant amusement, but as a career, a way of life to which one dedicates oneself.

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<sup>1</sup>Chamard, The Pléiade, vol. IV, p. 156.

### CHAPTER III

#### FRANÇOIS DE MALHERBE AND MATHURIN RÉGNIER

The ending of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth was a troubled period of intense religious activity and civil war in France. The Huguenots aimed at establishing an independent state of their own. By the same token, the Catholic League aimed not merely to suppress Protestantism, but to increase the powers of the nobles, and turn France into a loose federation of provinces with a puppet king. As a result of the mounting hostility between the Huguenots and the Catholics, and a weak central government which attempted to assert itself in the face of the hostile parties, France was torn asunder, falling prey to external forces.

After the assassination of Henry III, Henry IV succeeded to the throne in 1589. He was able, by military skill, his conversion to Catholicism, his tolerance and leniency, to extend authority over the whole of France. The Edict of Nantes (1598), established the principle of religious toleration and, simultaneously, peace. Afterwards, the King and his minister, Sully, restored order and prosperity to France.

The new social and political conditions of the country



were reflected in the literature. "La littérature, comme la France, se repose."<sup>1</sup> Poetry reflected this somber period of transition by an increased seriousness of purpose. The poets of the period wrote in a grave moralistic spirit, producing a large quantity of heroic poetry.

Philippe Desportes was still acknowledged as Ronsard's successor at Court, but he had ceased to write. The official laureate was Jean Bertaut, later joined by Jacques Davy du Perron. Both became courtiers. The two rallied to Henry IV and, according to the measure of their talent, helped to smooth the path for his conversion. Like the French people, poetry submitted to discipline, order, and regularity. It was marked by a colder sensibility and a less fertile imagination. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the poets had been moving towards greater clarity and a more rigorous technique in poetry writing. This movement was realized with the advent of François de Malherbe.

François de Malherbe was born in 1555 in Caen where he began his study of law. His father, counsellor to the governor, sent him to Germany to finish his studies. Shortly after his return, he renounced the magistracy, having decided to undertake a military career. For Malherbe, "l'épée est la vraie profession du gentilhomme."<sup>2</sup> He then joined the service of Henry of Angoulême, the Grand Prior who was charged

<sup>1</sup>Arthur Tilley, The Literature of the French Renaissance, Vol. II (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1959), p. 264.

<sup>2</sup>Gustave Allais, Malherbe et la poésie française (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), p. 50.

with the government of Provence. Being twenty-one years of age, Malherbe left his native city, abandoning a position in government that he was sure to inherit from his father. When Henry of Angoulême went to Marseille, Malherbe followed, establishing himself at Aix. At that time, he had become the first secretary of the Grand Prior. Under patronage of the governor Malherbe was associated with the elite society of Aix. It was there that he met and married Madeleine, daughter of Louis of Carriolis, president of the parliament. In 1585, they had a son, Henry, who lived but twenty-seven months. The following year, Malherbe was obligated to go to Normandy. Shortly thereafter, he learned that the Grand Prior had been killed in a duel.

In 1597 Malherbe went to Paris. Because of Henry of Angoulême's death, he was in search of a patron; and it was there in Paris, that he published his poem "Larmes de Saint-Pierre" and presented it to Henry III. Later in 1600, he presented to Maria of Medici, bride of Henry IV, an ode "sur sa bienvenue en France." In 1601, Du Perron, having renounced poetry, recommended Malherbe to the King. In 1605, Henry IV accorded Malherbe an audience and commissioned a poem from him. Malherbe wrote for the King, "Prière pour le Roi allant en Limousin," in which he saluted the King, calling for God's benediction upon him. He became the official court poet, serving Henry IV, then Maria of Medici and Louis XIII until his death in 1628.

Malherbe's poems fall into four main groups: official poems, religious poems, consolations, and love poems. The official poems written for particular occasions and for the flattery of the great (Henry IV, Maria of Medici, Louis XIII, Gaston of Orleans, Richelieu, et cetera), are full of hyperbolic praise of the beauty and virtue of the queens and princesses and of the valor and wisdom of the kings and their counsellors, of the prosperity they gave France in time of peace and their victories in time of war. A national poet too, Malherbe celebrated civil concord and royal authority.

Malherbe did not share the lofty conception of poetry or of the poet and his mission as did the Pléiade. For him, technique was of greater importance than inspiration, and the poet was not the unacknowledged legislator of mankind. Expressing himself to Honorat de Bueil, Seigneur de Racan, one of his disciples, he says:

voyez-vous Monsieur, si nos vers vivent après nous,  
toute la gloire que nous en pouvons espérer est  
qu'on dira que nous avons été deux excellents ar-  
rangeurs de syllabes.<sup>1</sup>

He remarked to a friend that:

Un bon poète n'était pas plus utile à l'Etat qu'un  
bon joueur de quilles.<sup>2</sup>

In matters concerning politics:

Il ne fallait point se mêler de la conduite d'un  
vaisseau où l'on n'était que simple passager.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>p. J. Yarrow, A Literary History of France, Vol. II (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1967), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

On the other hand however, he believed that poetry, if it was not a means of conveying social or political truth, could confer immortality:

Par les Muses seulement  
L'homme est exempt de la Parque,  
Et ce qui porte leur marque  
Demeure éternellement.<sup>1</sup>

He believed indeed that he possessed the gift of the immortalizer:

Tous vous savent louer, mais non également;  
Les ouvrages communs vivent quelques années:  
Ce que Malherbe écrit dure éternellement.<sup>2</sup>

For Malherbe, poetry was a matter of hard work, technique counting above all. He was a purist in matters of language, disdaining Ronsard's work as well as the Pléiade's and its followers. Known as a censor of the earlier poets, Malherbe also condemned Ronsardian innovations on poetry and on the French language.

François de Malherbe believed himself to be the reformer of the French language, seeking to purify it. He held that the poet needed first of all an impeccable tool: a pure language. He set himself to the task. He opposed borrowings from the Greek and compound epithets; he objected to Latinisms, archaisms, dialect and technical words, and the abuse of diminutives; and he insisted that poetry should obey the normal rules of grammar. He wanted poetry to be written in the language of everyday speech; he wanted it to be clear,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

precise, and logical, and not to offend common sense.<sup>1</sup>

In opposition to Ronsard, Malherbe did not believe in the miracle of inspiration or personal lyricism. He was a man of reason as opposed to emotion. His doctrine, which emphasized concentration on technical details, had many followers and just as many critics. Malherbe was criticized bitterly by Mathurin Régnier and even his most illustrious disciples, François Mainard and Racan, did not rigorously observe all his precepts.<sup>2</sup>

Many of Malherbe's critics did not consider him a poet but rather a Reformer who was "necessary." P. J. Yarrow asserts:

In stressing the need for rigorous technique, in giving the example of a style that is at once clear, concise, and vigorous, Malherbe was a salutary and necessary influence.<sup>3</sup>

Gustave Allais believed that:

Le génie de Malherbe fut l'oeuvre du temps et de la réflexion; on pourrait lui appliquer la définition de Buffon....Il n'était pas un de ces hommes rares, privilégiés de la nature; doués d'un tempérament spécial, animés d'une flamme intérieure, poussés par je ne sais quelle force mystérieuse, ils surgissent tout à coup parmi leurs contemporains éblouis: tout autre fut Malherbe.<sup>4</sup>

Malherbe n'a rien de tendre; comme poète, les nuances du sentiment, les délicatesses du coeur ne

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>Allais, p. 303.

sont pas son genre. Il est surtout un homme de pensée, un méditatif.<sup>1</sup>

Malherbe conceived the poet's task as being simply a versifier, and--in reference to him alone--an immortalizer. By virtue of his regimented doctrine on poetry, he inspired the classical spirit. Fulfilling his proclaimed role as the reformer of the French language, poetry in particular, Malherbe determined the form and the inspiration of classical poetry. The failure to realize the classical ideal of literary art was due to the lack of the critical spirit. To create this spirit was the work of Malherbe.<sup>2</sup>

Among Malherbe's most ardent contemporary critics and opposers was Mathurin Régnier. Régnier was indeed a disciple of the Pléiade. Like his masters, he pillaged the Italians, like them he was indifferent to the virtues of order and artistic construction, like them he was without the faculty of self-criticism, like them he wrote in a language which was habitually metaphorical and picturesque, and like them he was firmly convinced that poetry was an affair not of reason but of imagination.<sup>3</sup>

Régnier was born at Chartres in 1573. His father, Jacques Régnier, was an alderman, belonging to one of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 399-400.

<sup>2</sup>Yarrow, History of France, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup>Tilley, The French Renaissance, p. 291.

more notable families in the city. His mother, Simone Desportes, was sister to the poet Philippe Desportes, secretary of Henry III. In 1582, at the age of nine, he received his tonsure and being quite young, he was attached to the suite of the Cardinal Joyeuse, the protector of France at the Court of Rome:

C'est donc pourquoy si jeune abandonnant la France  
J'allay vif de courage et tout chaud d'esperance  
En la cour d'un Prelat, qu'aveq' mille dangers  
J'ay suivi courtisan aux pais estrangers.<sup>1</sup>

Régnier accompanied the Cardinal to Rome, where he led a rather libertine life, spending much of his time in Italy.

In 1605, Régnier returned from his journey, settling in Paris. At the death of his uncle, Desportes, he received a pension and a canonry at Chartres which was conferred on him in 1609. He died at Rouen in 1613 at the age of thirty-nine.

Régnier's conception of the poet and the poet's task was largely that of the Pléiade. For him, "poetry was a matter of enthusiasm or fire, of being carried away, not of technique," (Satire V).<sup>2</sup> He praised Ronsard, Jodelle, and his uncle, Desportes in his poems. He imitated Ronsard in his verse and he remained faithful to the Pléiade:

Je vais le grand chemin que mon oncle m'apprit,  
Laisant la ces docteurs les Muses instruisent  
En des arts tout nouveaux....(Satire IX).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Vianey, Mathurin Régnier (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Yarrow, History of France, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Régnier believed in the dignity of the poet and poetic expression.

In defense of Ronsard and the Pléiade, Régnier opposed the doctrine of Malherbe. He criticized Malherbe for "cavalierly" dismissing all his predecessors as worthless, for his concentration on technical details, and his lack of real poetry. He suggested that Malherbe's interest in technique sprang from a desire to cover up the lack of real poetic feeling:

Nul aiguillon divin n'élève leur courage,  
 Ils rampent bassement, faibles d'inventions,  
 Et n'osent, peu hardis, tenter les fictions,  
 Froids à l'imaginer, car s'ils font quelque chose,  
 C'est proser de la rime et rimer de la prose,  
 Que l'art lime et relime et polit de façon  
 Qu'elle rend à l'oreille un agréable son;  
 Et voyant qu'un beau feu leur cervelle n'embrase,  
 Ils attifent leurs mots, ajolivent leur phrase,  
 Affectent leur discours, tout si relevé d'art,  
 Et peignent leurs défauts de couleurs et de fard....<sup>1</sup>

It was the divine faculty of imagination which separated Régnier from Malherbe and marked him definitely as belonging to the Pléiade camp. According to Malherbe, "le vrai poète, porté 'de fureur' et d'un art 'qui ne semble point art aux versificateurs', s'achemine sans se soucier beaucoup des règles de grammaire."<sup>2</sup>

Régnier's work consists of diverse poems, official pieces and spiritual poetry, but especially of satires. He denounced and ridiculed the customs of his time, the practices

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Mélanges (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1951), p. 143.



of the court and the lamentable aspect of "starving poets." He possessed a gift of realistic description which made him the creator of French satire. As a painter of his times, according to Joseph Vianey, "Régnier l'est en perfection."<sup>1</sup>

A contemporary of Malherbe, Régnier did not submit to the influence of his doctrine. Rather, he held to the conception of the poet as being more than a mere versifier, and poetry as being the product of divine inspiration. Malherbe and Régnier's differences are found in the fundamental conception they each formed of poetry. The former was guided solely by reason and discipline; the latter by native genius and imagination.

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<sup>1</sup>Vianey, Mathurin Régnier, p. 227.

## CONCLUSION

The role of the poet as defined by history and authenticated by time is one of teacher, leader, revelator and interpreter of life, moralizer, and immortalizer of men. The French poets--Marot, Ronsard, Malherbe, and R  gnier--have all filled one or more of the aforementioned capacities. The mission chosen and conceived by each is reflective of and contingent upon the realm of knowledge from which each had to draw as well as the general vicissitudes of his times.

Cl  ment Marot is indeed considered a product of his time. As a rh  toriqueur, he retained the conception of the poet which he inherited from his father. Greatly influenced by the Court, he believed it his duty to laud the king and to please the public for which he wrote. Reconciled to the realization that a court poet was bound to the great and the noble, Marot accepted his limitations as a poet. Though he resigned himself to the limitations that accompanied the vocation of a court poet, he retained a dignified conception of the poet and the poet's mission, and through his work he projected the conception of the role of the poet as being, in particular, a moralizer and especially an immortalizer.

The court poet, by virtue of his position, was one who out of necessity depended upon others of noble or royal rank.

Marot realized this fact. Others, like Pierre de Ronsard, realized it also, but refused to resign themselves to it, struggled against it, but yet were conquered by it. Thus, Marot was severely criticized and subsequently dismissed by his successors as an obsequious and servile panegyrist. The role of the poet as moralizer and immortalizer was one already established by Marot. Though they condemned him, Ronsard and the Pleiade adopted these tenets and other ideas and innovations from Marot and developed them as though they were ideas which they themselves had coined. The Italianizing of the French court directed the poetic career of Marot. Serving in the capacity of court poet, Ronsard was also greatly influenced by the Court. With the advent of Ronsard, however, the poet's concept of his mission was clearly pronounced. According to Ronsard the poet was one chosen and inspired by God himself; a moralist seeking virtue and truth; a portrayer and imitator of nature; and immortalizer of men, bestowing glory upon the great. With the increasing unrest that mounted between the Catholics and Protestants, Ronsard, seeing the poet as one concerned with proper government, became advisor to the crown as well as spokesman for his countrymen.

Just as Ronsard denounced Marot, though as a court poet he continued and perfected Marot's style as a court poet, François Malherbe, who initially wrote in the fashion of Ronsard, did in turn denounce and shun the ideas of Ronsard

and the members of the Pléiade. Malherbe conceived the role of the poet as a mere versifier and--in reference to him alone--an immortalizer of the great. Thus, he lauded Marot who he believed acted in this capacity; and condemned Ronsard for attempting to be something other than a versifier. Malherbe, like Marot was a product of his circumstances, though he did impress himself upon his time. It is said that Henry IV, Richelieu, and Louis XIV disciplined the state; Malherbe, the Academy, and Boileau disciplined literature.<sup>1</sup> The order established by Henry IV after the turmoil of the religious-civil wars was injected into literature by Malherbe. He rejected the theories of inspiration and the noble conception of the poet, instituting or substituting only hard work, discipline, and technique.

Régnier, continuator of Ronsard, contemporary of Malherbe, retained the ideas of the poet as an inspired one and his role as being more than that of an "arranger of verse." Directly opposing Malherbian tenets, he guarded those of the Renaissance poets.

From period to period and from individual to individual, the role of the poet, though always following one or more of the defined roles, is invariably influenced by the milieu of the poet. Many times the poet can select his role and influence his milieu, but more often than not his role is

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<sup>1</sup>Gustave Allais, Malherbe et la poésie française (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), p. 17.

thrust upon him and it is his actual environment along with his immediate and historical past that influence him as a poet and his conception of his task as poet.

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